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ABSTRACT

This report describes the developmental education program at Jefferson Davis Community College (JDCC) (Alabama). Approximately 59% of JDCC's student population must take pre-college, or developmental, courses in math, reading, English, and study skills. JDCC's developmental program includes computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in reading, math, and English, and is enhanced through classroom instruction, individualized written assignments, and optional job awareness activities available through the college's learning lab. Collectively, the program activities attempt to improve the students' chances for academic success and increase their self-confidence as productive, contributing citizens in society. Students are placed in appropriate college level or pre-college level courses according to their scores on the COMPASS, which they take upon enrollment at the college. Enrollment for the reading, math, and English developmental classes is limited to 20 students to ensure that each student receives as much individualized instruction as possible. Comparative data between the term CAI was initiated and the previous year reveals a 7% decrease in the number of withdrawals in Basic Writing II and Elementary Algebra, a 12% decrease in unsatisfactory grades in Basic Writing II, and an 11% decrease in the number of unsatisfactory grades in Elementary Algebra. (JA)

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Jefferson Davis Community College and Developmental Education: A Partnership for Student Success

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Jefferson Davis Community College and Developmental Education:

A Partnership for Student Success

Jefferson Davis Community College (JDCC), located in rural south Alabama, has established in its mission statement the commitment "to provide accessible quality educational opportunities, promote economic growth, and enhance the quality of life for the people of Alabama." JDCC believes that the phrase enhancing the "quality of life" means more than academics and suggests improving one's personal well-being.

The average age of a student at JDCC is twenty-five years, indicating that the average student has not been in school in a number of years. Therefore, many of JDCC's students feel insecure in their academic abilities, often affecting their belief and confidence in themselves as human beings. Because of JDCC's diverse student population - approximately 59% of which must take pre-college, or developmental, courses in math, reading, English, and study skills – the commitment to provide educational opportunities, especially through a comprehensive developmental educational program, is essential to the success of the students in college-level courses, as well as in various roles in the community. This developmental program includes computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in reading, math, and English, and is enhanced through classroom instruction, individualized written assignments, and optional job awareness activities available through the college's Learning Lab. Collectively, the program activities attempt to improve the students' chances for academic success and increase their self-confidence as productive, contributing citizens in society.

During the past five years, JDCC has grown from an institution that offered limited developmental classes with no mandatory placement, unlimited class size, and little program management, to one that offers, through an organized Developmental Studies program, multiple-level developmental courses in math, reading, and English, which are centered around CAI and unified and regulated through common course syllabi and departmentalized final exams, thus

ensuring mastery of skills as outlined in each course's objectives and increasing the students' level of success in subsequent level courses.

Students are placed in appropriate college-level or pre-college level courses according to their scores on the COMPASS, which they take upon enrollment at the college. Those who place in developmental courses are advised to enroll in them immediately so that they can meet their academic, as well as personal, goals as soon as possible. Students who test into two or more areas of developmental courses are required to take a study skills class. The format of this class is not based on CAI, but rather on classroom lecture, group activities, and hands-on projects that focus on basic study skills; time management; self awareness and confidence; goal setting; and job preparation skills, such as resume writing and interviewing.

Enrollment for the reading, math, and English developmental classes is limited to twenty students to ensure that each student receives as much individualized instruction as possible. Developmental instructors maintain an easily accessible, nurturing approach to working with their classes so that the students feel comfortable asking for additional help when needed. Instructors are carefully selected and evaluated to ensure that this atmosphere is consistent.

To enhance this personalized approach to instruction in the developmental classroom, JDCC offers both instructional resources and assistance through the Learning Lab that is managed by a Learning Lab Coordinator and funded by the Activity I portion of the college's Title III grant, which has as its goal to increase "student retention through information management and a comprehensive developmental program." The grant funds the position of Learning Lab Coordinator, as well as Activity I Director, who also serves as Coordinator of Developmental Studies.

In the Learning Lab, students take an initial assessment on the PLATO software program at the beginning of each term to determine their strengths and weaknesses. From those assessments, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed, and the students work in the lab via CAI and focused facilitation by the instructor to complete specialized modules to

remediate deficiencies based on their IEP. The assessment and subsequent computerized lessons in the seven developmental courses are aligned to the objectives of the course. To increase the students' ability to master these objectives, the instructor often conducts traditional classroom lectures and group activities as necessary to meet the learning needs of the students. This format is especially helpful at the beginning of each term to help ease developmental students' apprehensions about attending college and completing work on computers.

The Learning Lab Coordinator, who works closely with the students and instructors to assist the latter in setting personal goals and objectives and creating a time management plan for completion of the assignments, monitors the students' progress regularly. A progress report is sent to all instructors every four weeks throughout the term. If a student is not mastering the assigned work or is not progressing according to the suggested timeline, the Learning Lab Coordinator alerts the instructor and often meets with the student to discuss possible solutions and to set up one-on-one tutoring in math or English with a tutor provided by the college. This tutoring service, while designed to assist developmental students, is not limited to them and is offered to all students on campus. Any instructor can identify students who are experiencing difficulty and make recommendations for them to take advantage of the tutoring service. In fact, many tutors choose to incorporate various software programs available in the lab to enhance the tutoring sessions.

In addition to the PLATO software program, which is used as the basis for CAI, the SkillsBank software program and programs for building skills in speed reading, study habits, communication, math, writing, and nursing are available. Also, web-based tutorials are often utilized by many developmental instructors as supplemental material to assist students in reinforcing certain skills. For example, some English and reading instructors choose to incorporate web-based career awareness activities into the class assignments. These activities are designed to provide opportunities to create a personal e-mail account, participate in self-awareness and job skills assessments, explore career opportunities, develop job preparation skills,

and research information about transfer institutions and scholarships while having the advantage of applying online. Also, students are encouraged to continue using this free service after they have completed their developmental coursework, and all students at the college have the opportunity to take advantage of these resources. In fact, many instructors on the academic level have begun bringing their classes to the lab to utilize its resources.

JDCC believes that the CAI approach designed to enhance the individualized approach to instruction works well to meet the needs of its students. The CAI format was initiated during Summer Term 2000 and comparative data between that term and Summer Term 1999, in which the traditional classroom method of instruction was used, reveals a 7% decrease in the number of withdrawals in both Basic Writing II and Elementary Algebra, which were offered both terms; a 14% increase in Satisfactory grades and 12% decrease in Unsatisfactory grades in Basic Writing II; and a 12% increase in the number of Satisfactory grades and an 11% decrease in the number of Unsatisfactory grades in Elementary Algebra. Multiple-level instruction was initiated Fall Semester 2000, and at time of publication, no data was available for analysis.

Through JDCC's comprehensive learning assistance program comprised of multiple-level developmental courses and the Learning Lab, which combined offer content-specific, computer-assisted instruction; career planning activities; and one-on-one tutoring, the college believes that it is meeting the needs of its students, whether they are GED recipients, recently graduated high school seniors, or students returning to school after having reared a family or having been displaced from a job. In meeting these needs, the college is ensuring that its community has the opportunity for an enhanced "quality of life."